

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OPR-02 IO-13 AF-08 SCA-01 AID-05

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 979

INFO SITREP COLLECTIVE PRIORITY 0003

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 5953

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, PINS, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION JULY 7: PALESTINIAN OFFENSIVE IN NORTH
FALTERS; ARAB LEAGUE MEDIATION EFFORT REVIVES

REF: BEIRUT 5917

1. SUMMARY: PALESTINIAN DRIVE IN NORTH IS FALTERING AND
CHRISTIANS HOPE EXPAND EARLIER ESTABLISHED AREAS OF CONTROL
IN COUNTEROFFENSIVE. TELL ZAATAR MOP-UP CONTINUESUK FIGHTING
ELSEWHERE IN BEIRUT AND IN REST OF COUNTRY CONTINUES AT HIGH
LEVEL, BUT INDECISIVE. INTER-ARAB MEDIATION EFFORTS REVIVE,
WITH SECOND SOFAR MEETING SCHEDULED FOR JULY 7 TO INCLUDE MOST
MAJOR PARTIES TO CONFLICT. BEIRUT AIRPORT RUNWAYS APPEAR TO
BE ONLY SLIGHTLY DAMAGED AND COULD HANDLE LARGE AIRCRAFT.
MINIMAL CITY WATER SUPPLY IN BEIRUT NOW COMPLETELY STOPPED AS
FUEL SHORTAGE WORSENS. SMALL BRITISH-ORGANIZED CONVOY DEPARTS
FOR DAMASCUS. END SUMMARY.

2. NORTH LEBANON HOLDS SPOTLIGHT AS RIGHTIST FORCES APPEAR TO
HAVE RETAKEN CHEKKA AND JOINT CHRISTIAN/SYRIAN COUNTER-THRUST
GAINS PREDOMINANCE. RIGHTIST ALSO CLAIM TO HAVE TAKEN AMYOUN
AND SEVERAL SURROUNDING VILLAES IN THE KOURA. LEFTISTS SAY
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THEY HAVE REPELLED ALL ATTACKS AND CONTINUE TO CONTROL EVEN

CHEKKA, BUT MORE RELIABLE INFORMATION CONTRADICTS THIS CLAIM. OTHER NORTHERN AREAS ARE VERY ACTIVE WITH UNUSUALLY HEAVY ARTILLERY BARRAGES AT ZGHORTA NAD HALBA. WE UNDERSTAND COMBINED RIGHTIST/SYRIAN FORCES MAY NOT INTEND TO STOP WITH PRESENT SUCCESSES, BUT MAY CONTINUE MOVE NORTHWARD TOWARD TRIPOLI.

3. TELL ZAATAR CONTINUES RECEIVE WIDE PRESS COVERAGE, ALTHOUGH ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMATION, BATTLE IS LARGELY OVER. ARTILLERY BARRAGES NEVERTHELESS CONTINUE IN VICINITY AT NABAA, DEKOUANEH, AND SIN EL-FIL AND LARGE FIRES, APPARENTLY WOODS, BURN AT SABTYE, DEKOUANE, MANSOURIEH, AND MKALLES. PRESS COMMENTS ON INACCESSIBLE BATTLE FIELDS AND CONTRADICTORY COMMUNIQUE FROM VARIOUS GROUPS REVEAL LACK OF GOOD FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE. PALESTINIAN ACCUSATIONS THAT SYRIANS HELPED CHRISTIANS AT TELL ZAATAR CONTINUE, AND WE UNDERSTAND SYRIANS POSSIBLY DID AT LEAST ASSIST RIGHTIST FORCES'S PLANNING. HEAVY MUTUAL BOMBARDMENTS AT CHIYA H/
AIN EL-RUMMANEH AND SOME GROUND ACTION CONTINUE. ARTILLERY DUELS CONTINUE AS WELL IN HADETH/LAYLAKE AREA. BEIRUT CENTRAL CITY AREA IS ACTIVE, INCLUDING SORTIES WITH HAND GRENADES AND SMALL WEAPONS. SPORADIC BOMBARDMENTS OF RESIDENTIAL AREAS IN EAST AND WEST SECTORS OF CAPITAL CONTINUE (INCLUDING RAS BEIRUT)

4. ELSEWHERE IN COUNTRY, MILITARY SITUATION REMAINS RELATIVELY STABLE. HEAVY SYRIAN ARTILLERY BARRAGES JULY 6 HIT SIDON, NEARBY VILLAGE OF ANKOUN AND PALESTINIAN CAMPS OF MYE MYE AND AIN EL-HELOUE, AS WELL AS ZAHRANI REFINERY (SEE BELOW). THIS WAS PERHAPS IN RETALIATION FOR PALESTINIAN AMBUSHES ON SIDON/JEZZINE ROAD. BEKAA REMAINS STABLE ALTHOUGH TENSIONS ARE HIGH AND AINTOURA/MTEIN AXIS MAY BE HEATING UP. SOME SYRIAN SHELLING OF VILLAGES REPORTED FROM HERMEL AREA. PALESTINIAN COMMAND IN SOUTH CLAIMS ISRAELI AIRCRAFT FLEW OVER BORDER AREA AND IDF ARTILLERY FIRED AT VILLAGES OF AITAROUN AND BLIDA.

5. MARATHON JULY 6 MEETING OF ARAFAT, JUNBLATT, AND LIBYAN PREMIER JALLOUD APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A TENSE ROUND ROBIN ON MANY ISSUES. DESPITE MILITARY DETERIORATION IN THE NORTH, SECOND MAJOR DIALOGUE SESSION EXPECTED AT SOFAR JULY 7.
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JUNBLATT REFUSING TO ATTEND THIS SOFAR MEETING PERHAPS DUE FEELING PALESTINIANS ARE STEALING SHOW. ARAFAT, JALLOUD, AL SECGEN MAHMOUD RIAD, REPRESENTATIVES FO SYRIA AND THE MARONITE "KFOUR FRONT" ALL SAY THE WILL ATTEND. GENERAL NAJI JAMIL WILL REPRESENT SYRIAN AND KARIM PAKRADOUNI AND MICHEL SAMAHA THE "KFOUR FRONT." MEETING TOPIC OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED AS MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS AT TELL ZAATAR, BUT PRESS SPECULATES DELEGATES WILL DEAL MAINLY WITH SYRIAN/PALESTINIAN DIFFERENCES AND

ESTABLISHMENT OF AL-SPONSORED CEASEFIRE. CONFLICTING DEMANDS MAKE ANY IMMEDIATE AGREEMENTS UNLIKELY. LEBANESE LEFTISTS SAY THEY WILL CONTINUE FIGHT UNTIL SYRIANS WITHDRAW ENTIRELY FROM LEBANON. RIGHTISTS CONTINUE INSIST ON CIARO ACCORDS AAD RETURN OF PALESTINIANS TO CAMPS.

6. EMBRYONIC MOSLEM DISSATISFACTION WITH PALESTINIAN DOMINANCE IN WEST BEIRUT IS PLAYED ON BY PIERRE GEMAYEL IN JULY 6 CALL TO POLITICAL LEADERS OF WEST BEIRUT TO CLOSE RANSK WITHOUT DELAY "TO LIBERATE THE LEBANESE FROM THE PALESTINIAN PROGRESSIVE YOKE." HE SAID THAT KATAEB PARTY WILL CONTINUE FIGHT UNTIL ALL LEBANESE REGIONS ARE LIBERATED. SYRIA, ACTIVE MILITARILY, AVOIDS GETTING INVOLVED IN "BATTLE OF THE AIR WAVES."

7. WE UNDERSTAND CHAMOUN ATTEMPTING FORCE ISSUE OF HIS CONTESTED APPOINTMENT AS FOREIGN MINISTER (BY FRANGIE, WITHOUT AGREEMENT OF PRIME MINISTER KARAME) BY SENDING INSTRUCTIONS TO ALL LEBANESE AMBASSADORS TO APPROACH HOST GOVERNMENT TO EXPLAIN LEBANESE SITUATION AND INSTRUCTION TO LEBANESE UN MISSION TO SUPPORT SUDAN IN SUDAN-LIBYA QUARREL.

8. ICRC DC-6 CARRIED SIX TONS OF MEDICINES INTO BEIRUT AIRPORT JULY 6, AND ANOTHER FLIGHT EXPECTED JULY 7. MINISTER OF ECONOMY AND TRANSPORTATION ADEL OSSEIRAN SAYS REOPENING OF AIRPORT NOT EVEN CONSIDERED FOR PRESENT DUE "ILLOGICAL CONDITIONS IMPOSED BY THE KATAEB WAR COUNCIL." ICRC FLIGHT WAS FIRST SINCE JUNE 27 WHEN MEA PLANE HIT ON RUNWAY BY CHRISTIAN ARTILLERY. RELIABLE MEA SOURCE SAID JULY 6 RUNWAY SURFACES HAVE EIGHT SMALL RUPTURES, BUT THAT BOEING 707 TYPE AIRCRAFT COULD LAND AND TAKE OFF. CLOSURE CAUSING GREAT DIFFIKLTY ESPECIALLY IN VIEW NEED TO IMPORT FOOD SUPPLIES AND INABILITY WESTERN ZONE LEBANESE TO EASILY ENTER AND LEAVE COUNTRY.

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9. BEIRUT WATER BUREAU SAYS IT CAN NO LONGER DELIVER EVEN SMALL AMOUNTS OF WATER TO VARIOUS BEIRUT SECTORS, AS LACK OF FUEL HAS CUT OFF ELECTRICITY TO DBAYE PUMPING STATION, WHICH DURING PAST TWO WEEKS HAS BEEN SOLE REMAINING CITY WATER SOURCE, PUMPING SMALL AMOUNTS TO VARIOUS CITY SECTORS ON RATOATION BASIS. BEIRUTIS MUST NOW RELY ON INSUFFICIENT AND OFTEN BRACKISH WELLS. SITUATION MAY HAVE TAKEN ADDITIONAL CRITICAL TURN WITH NEWS THAT ZAHRANI REFINERY NEAR SIDON WAS BOMBARDED BY SYRIANS JULY 6 AND IS NOW REPORED BURNING. FUEL FOR ZOUK ELECTRIC STATION NORTH OF BEIRUT HAS BEEN ORDERED FROM RUMANIA, BUT DELIVERY NOT SCHEDULED FOR SOME TEN DAYS.

10. BRITISH EMBASSY SPONSORED COMPARATIVELY SMALL CONVOY OF 25 VEHICLES TO DAMASCUS JULY 7. CONVOY CARRIED 10 AMCITS, INCLUDING

ONE EMBASSY MEMBER.
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